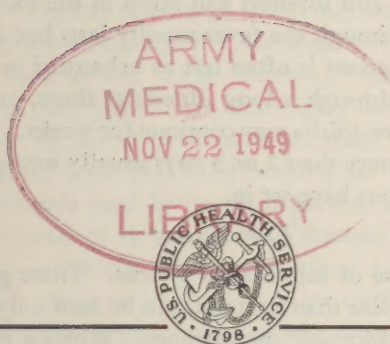


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Influenza



FEDERAL SECURITY AGENCY

Public Health Service

Health Information Series No. 36

Influenza

Influenza is an infectious disease which starts out somewhat like a common cold. Although influenza is seldom a direct cause of death, it is considered serious because it so often paves the way for pneumonia. A combination of these two diseases caused about 20,000,000 deaths during the world-wide influenza outbreak of 1918.

A single case of influenza appears occasionally, but usually the disease occurs in epidemic form. People catch it from each other. They catch it so easily, that it is not unusual for a large part of a community to come down with it within the first few days of an epidemic. Most epidemics of influenza last less than a month in one place; but tend to travel as a wave throughout the country, and sometimes all over the world. It is possible for a community to have two or three outbreaks in one winter.

Symptoms

Influenza attacks suddenly. The symptoms can be some or all of the following: Fever, chilly sensations, sweats, headache, sore throat, runny nose, bronchitis, and soreness and aches in the back and limbs. Although the fever usually lasts but 2 or 3 days, the patient is often left as exhausted as if he had gone through a long illness; at times, exhaustion and low spirits may continue for weeks. Fever that lasts more than 2 or 3 days usually means that complications have set in.

The Cause

The cause of influenza is a virus. These germs, smaller in size than bacteria, can be seen only with powerful electronic microscopes. When a person has influenza, or is just coming down with it, the secretions in his mouth and nose contain the viruses. The disease is spread when these secretions get into the noses and mouths of other people. There are many ways that this can happen. The most common is through sneezing or coughing virus-laden

spray into the air for others to breathe. Other ways in which the infection is passed from one to another are through kissing, and through the common use of drinking glasses, towels, or other objects that have been freshly soiled by these secretions.

Prevention

During an epidemic, when many people around you are becoming sick with influenza, it is almost impossible to avoid getting in the path of a few coughs and sneezes. However, there are a few sensible precautions to take at such times. (1) Keep your health as good as possible so that your body will be strong enough to conquer an occasional small batch of virus. (2) For the short duration of an epidemic, you will be safer to stay out of crowds such as you find at movies and dances. As you carry on your necessary activities, try to keep your distance from people who do not cover their coughs and sneezes with a handkerchief or tissue.

If anyone in your family has influenza, keep his dishes and towels separate from the family's. Persuade him to cover his coughs and sneezes with paper tissues which he can drop at once into a paper bag. Replace these bags frequently and wash your hands after burning the used bags. When there is influenza or any other "catching" disease in the house, wash your hands thoroughly and often with plenty of soap. Always scrub them well before handling food and after waiting on the patient.

Methods used by health departments to combat the spread of slower moving diseases are of little help against the swift attack of an influenza epidemic. It is really up to you to understand how this disease spreads from one person to another, and to protect yourself sensibly during an epidemic. In the event that you feel symptoms starting, do not forget that your illness is catching, and that those around you are in danger if you are careless. Influenza is most easily transmitted during the early stages of the illness.

There is an influenza vaccine now available which gives protection for several months against *some* influenza epidemics. Strains of influenza virus may vary from one epidemic to another. Until research laboratories are able to isolate and study all possible strains, there can be no *single* vaccine capable of giving protection against all epidemics. This vaccine does not prevent common colds.

Treatment

No known medicine will cure influenza. Sulfa and penicillin have no effect upon it, although they are used to combat some of the complications which may follow. Getting well without developing dangerous complications, depends upon giving your body every known advantage while it fights the influenza infection. Go to bed when symptoms start! Even if the illness turns out to be nothing but a common cold, you will get well sooner; meantime you will not be giving your cold to others. Wear a warm robe and slippers if you have to get up out of bed. Keep warm and out of a draft. Eat simple foods that agree with you. Don't receive callers—they might bring in new germs. Don't use nose drops or other drugs left over from past illnesses, or medicines that well-meaning friends recommend.

If you have a fever, call your doctor. He can make you more comfortable, and if you will cooperate with him, he can do much to protect you against dangerous complications. Be sure to stay in bed until your doctor says that all danger of pneumonia seems past. And, for the safety of those in your home, remember that you have a catching disease.

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